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ABSTRACT

Adult "redoing" sequences (expansions and repeats) in conversations between adult and child (age 1;6) are analyzed with a conversational analytic approach, and two ways in which redoing sequences are involved in the initiation of repair are explored. It is proposed that a redoing sequence picks up a child's utterance and displays it for some kind of work to be done. This work may be corrective, evaluative, or investigative, may be immediate or delayed, and may be undertaken by either the "redoer" or the speaker of the original utterance. These sequences are one way in which talk gets talked about or attended to as language. It is suggested that the interactional approach is important in the study of child language because the detailed examination of the interactional contexts of children's utterances reveals more evidence of how the utterances function for the participants. Redoings and other features of language-focused talk are recommended for further investigation as fundamental features of the kind of talk through and within which language skills develop. (MSE)

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CONFIRMATION AND REPAIR: AN INTERACTIONAL ANALYSIS OF REDOING SEQUENCES IN CHILD-ADULT TALK*

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Abstract

Much research interest has focussed on the use of expansions in adults' speech to children, and on the ways in which their use may facilitate a child's grammatical development. A detailed investigation of such phenomena in their interactional contexts reveals a wider range of functions to be identifiable than is suggested in the literature. This paper takes a conversation analytic approach to an investigation of 'redoing' sequences (adults' expansions and repeats) in conversations between an adult and a child of 1;6, and explores two ways in which redoing sequences are involved in the initiation of repair.

It is seen that redoings may serve to acknowledge a child utterance and confirm its appropriacy. At the same time, they may initiate phonetic repair on that utterance. Acknowledgements and confirmations from an adult (which may take the form of redoings) are expected by the child. The child is seen to treat an absence of confirmation as an indication of some kind of trouble in her or his prior utterance. In this way, the withholding of a confirmatory redoing by an adult prompts the child to effect self-repair.

* My thanks go to John Local for assistance with the transcription of phonetic detail throughout this paper.

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1. Introduction

This paper arises as part of a larger investigation, which examines various ways in which the talk which occurs between children and adults makes 'language form' its focus of attention. One of the significant things which adults and children do when they talk together, is that they talk about the language involved in that talk, as they are doing it. Conversations between adults, particularly in certain repair sequences, do address formal aspects of talk; but this happens far more pervasively, and in a somewhat different way, in adult-child talk. And it seems to me that it is this 'language-focussed' quality of child-adult interaction which is crucial to that interaction being the context in and through which language development occurs. Children learn about talking not just through being involved in interactions, but through those interactions themselves dealing with the talk which is their medium, as they take place. A detailed examination of this feature of child-adult interaction, then, is likely to yield important insights into the nature of children's language development.

Redoings are just one, albeit pervasive, phenomenon of adult-child conversations where talk is worked on in this metalinguistic way; and they are the subject of investigation in this paper. Redoings concern what an adult does *after* a child's utterance. The term is a coinage, and requires clarification, particularly with regard to the notions of *expansion* and *repeat*, commonly presented in the literature on child language. The notion of expansion is one which originates with Brown and Bellugi (1964). Expansions are the kind of things which adults typically do when talking with a young child whose speech is seen as 'telegraphic' or abbreviated in some way: they repeat or redo the child's utterance, and also expand on it, filling in, as it were, the missing parts. An example of an expansion, taken from Brown and Bellugi (1964: 141), is the mother's utterance in the following sequence.

(1) Child : Eve lunch
Mother : Eve is having lunch

In the literature, the use of these expansions is often contrasted with the use of non-expanded repeats, where adults repeat the exact words of a child's utterance, without adding anything to it. However, for my data I found this distinction between expansion and repeat to be not a particularly valuable tool for analysing this group of phenomena. It is a distinction based on whether the adult adds something to the child's utterance or not, and, it seems to me, may be telling us more about how telegraphic or how adult-like the child's speech is, than it is about how the interaction between child and adult is organised. In other words, it is a structurally derived distinction which cannot be assumed to have interactional significance. So instead I use the term *redoings* - covering both expansions and repeats, and also some other related phenomena - to designate a class of utterance types in which an adult produces some version of a child's prior utterance, or redoes at least some aspect of it.[1]

Expansions in particular (and repeats to a lesser extent) have attracted a great deal of research interest, because they have been identified as a characteristic feature of a 'motherese' style of speech - a speech register seen as aiding the child's language development. But the weakness which I see in the way these phenomena have been dealt with in the literature, is that they have been assigned communicative functions without any detailed consideration of the interactional contexts in which they occur. For example, expansions have been seen as supplying 'corrective feedback' on a child's incorrect grammar. Whitehurst and Novak (1973: 333), for instance, see these redoings as providing a corrected model for the child, and they note that the child is often observed to imitate the modelled correction. But there is no consideration of whether a redoing is *designed* as a model - whether these sequences are organised by the participants to provide for such an imitation by the child. Another function assigned to redoings is that they check on an

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1 I use the phrase 'at least some aspect of it', because there are instances in the data where an adult seems to 'mimic' the child, by redoing certain prosodic features of the child's utterance, like pitch and voice quality - and this can happen where there is no repetition of the child's words. It is not only structural aspects of utterances, then, which can be redone; although it is the redoing of words with which this paper is concerned.

adult's understanding of the child's speech - but again, this interpretation has been made, on the whole, without recourse to a detailed investigation of the interactional sequences involved, to establish, for instance, whether these understanding checks are clarification requests, which put the onus for clarification on to the child, and require the child to take a following turn. And redoings have been described as 'interpretative' - as serving to interpret a child's unclear utterances (Ryan 1974: 199). But who are these interpretations for? Are they made for the benefit of the adult (like an understanding check), for the child's own benefit, or (conceivably) are they interpretations serving to clarify the child's speech for some third party witnessing the interaction?[2] These communicative functions, then, have been assigned without due attention to interactional detail.

What I am interested to do is to look in more detail than previous researchers have done at the interactional contexts which surround redoings, in order to gather more precise evidence for establishing just how this class of phenomena may be working for the interactional participants involved. What I will show is that these redoing sequences are performing a number of different interactional tasks, and that it doesn't make sense to say simply that they're serving to correct the child's utterance, or interpret the child's utterance, or whatever. 'Confirmation' is another function identified for redoings, and, as I will show, this, too, is a rather simplified account of what is going on. But in this paper I will be focussing on a class of redoings which are in some way working as acknowledgements and confirmations of a child's utterance, receipting and confirming the appropriacy of what the child has said. In particular, I want to examine two different ways in which the use of these confirmatory redoings is bound up with the initiation of repair.

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2 Wells 1980: 46, suggesting that expansions may have been misleadingly attributed a high frequency of occurrence and an inappropriate significance in earlier studies, reports, 'in our observations expansions only occur with any frequency when a stranger is present - a situation which has occurred in other studies when a researcher has been present during the collection of data'.

2. Data

Before moving on to an analysis of these phenomena, it is worth outlining both the nature of the data being used, and the way they are to be represented.

The observations which gave rise to this paper arose largely from data involving a single child. Initial analysis of other data shows similar patterns to be emerging in other interactional situations, with other children. But most of the illustrations for this paper are taken from data involving the one child - simply because these are the data which I have analysed in most detail so far for these particular phenomena. The child is 1;6, male, and has been audio-recorded interacting with his mother at home, with no observer present, and in as natural a setting as possible, since what I am interested to observe are the everyday conversations which the child is routinely party to.

The transcriptions used to represent this data aim to give a fuller illustration of interactional detail than is usually represented in the literature on child language, by including an indication of such things as in-breaths as prefaces to speech, overlap, and pause length. In general, I follow the conventions for transcript notation developed by Gail Jefferson, widely adopted within Conversation Analysis, and set out in Atkinson and Heritage (1984: ix-xvi). At times, however, a much higher degree of phonetic detail is appropriate - either to illustrate features of the relationship between utterances, or to represent unintelligible speech which cannot be adequately represented in standard orthography. Accordingly, many of the child's utterances are transcribed in some detail, using symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet, enclosed in square brackets. Turns or features to which attention is being drawn are indicated by an arrow in the left margin. The participants in the cited extracts are as follows:

I	:	1;6 (male)
C	:	1;11 (female)
J	:	3;10 (female) (C and J are sisters)
M	:	mother (in each case)

3. Analysis

Turning now to an investigation of the data, the remainder of this paper falls into two parts, concerned with two distinct but related conversational phenomena. The first group of things I want to look at is a class of redoing sequences in which the redoing seems to be both confirming the child's utterance, and effecting repair on it.

3.1 Simultaneous Confirmation and Repair

A first observation to make here is that children's utterances are very often followed by acknowledgements from adults. Adults tend to be very attentive to young children's speech, and to respond to their utterances, whenever such a response is appropriate, with an acknowledgement of some kind. It is also worth pointing out that many of a young child's utterances at the one word stage are names, and they are often deictic: they are the kind of utterances which point out objects in the world and name them. Many of the examples of redoings in the data occur during a picture book reading routine, which has something of the character of a naming test. The adult is showing the child pictures, and the child is required to provide an appropriate name. This is an interactional setting, then, in which talk is particularly language-focussed. In this setting it seems that not only acknowledgement, but beyond this some marker of confirmation or disconfirmation, is an appropriate adult response, following the child utterance.

There are a number of forms which these acknowledgements and confirmations may take. They may be non-verbal, and involve head nods and facial expressions, or they may involve minimal vocalisations like *mm hm* or *yeah*. But very often an acknowledgement or confirmation is done with a redoing. And these redoings fall into two broad structural categories - those which occur on their own, and those which are accompanied by a confirmatory marker like yes in the same turn.[3]

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[3] There appear to be significant distributional differences between these two classes of confirmatory redoings - those with *yes* in same turn overwhelmingly

Extracts (2) and (3) below serve as illustrations of the kind of sequences I am concerned with. Both sequences occur when child and adult are looking together at a picture book. Both illustrate an adult redoing serving to confirm the appropriacy of what the child has just said. In (2), the redoing occurs alone, while in (3) the redoing is followed by a *yes* in the same turn.

(2) M: 't 're thǫ:_s: e

(2.0)

I: [ɑ̃ʔkʰgɵˑʏʔtʂˑ]

(0.6)

I: [gʊɐˑɪʔtʂˑɕ [ʂˑ]

→ M: g:rape (h)

(3) M: righ [t] 's look in yǫur book what's that?

I: [kʰaˑβɐ]

(6.5)

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occurring at the end of sequences. It seems as if a redoing accompanied by a yes is a designedly sequence-terminating turn, and is a resource which the adult has, for instance, for withholding the business of repair.

I: p:ea: [( )

→ M: [pea: °h °yes°

It seems clear that in both these examples, the redoing is in some way providing confirmation of the child's naming attempt. In both cases, the pitch of the redoing turn falls quite markedly, which is typical of a turn at the end of a sequence rather than, say, a clarification request which projects further talk. In both extracts the redoing follows a *what's that?* type question from the adult, and is in a position where a confirmation of the child's response is appropriate.

A more interesting observation, though, is that for some of these sequences, while redoings are still serving to acknowledge and confirm, they can also, at the same time, be initiating repair. Extract (4) is a case in point. Once again, M is trying to elicit a name from the child in response to a picture.

(4) M: what's that?

(1.0)

I: [kˣɑ›ː ɕˑˡ]

→ M: [hɻˑ ᵊsːˌ]

→ I: [kˉʌʂ]

There are four things in particular to notice about this extract:

a) The adult utterance, the redoing [hɻˑ ᵊsːˌ], differs significantly from the child's preceding version, [kˣˑɑ›ː ɕˑˡ]. Most obviously, the adult utterance is a version of *horse*, in contrast to the child's

version of *horsie*, and begins with glottal friction as opposed to velar closure.

b) The child responds to the adult utterance, by supplying a second version, [kˉɻ̊ʂ̊] He need not necessarily have done this.

c) In that response, the child makes a significant modification of his earlier utterance. There are clearly many phonetic differences between the two versions [kˣˈɑɔː ɾˈˈɪ] and [kˉɻ̊ʂ̊]

d) Some of those phonetic differences bring the child's second version closer to the adult redoing. Most obviously, the child's second utterance is a version of *horse* rather than *horsie*. Also, the vowel component is raised and advanced, nearer in quality to the adult's [ʔ], and the final fricative is markedly similar to that of the adult utterance.

In other words, then, what these observations lead to is that *repair* is going on, and in this case it is phonetic repair. It seems that the adult can confirm an appropriate lexical selection on the part of the child, while repairing the phonetics of the child's utterance. And notice that in extract (4) the child's lexical choice *is* successfully confirmed. While the child produces three very different versions, they are all clearly some version of *horse* (or *horsie*). He makes no attempt to repair his choice of word - just his pronunciation of it.

A similar case is illustrated by the following extract, where the confirmatory function of the redoing is reinforced by an accompanying *yes*.

(5) I: [ʔɵˈɻɪç ʂ̺ʰaᵇβ̞ʂ̺əhˈ] ((pharyngealised/whispery voice))

M: c: a: rrot: yes

The difference here between the child utterance [ʂ̺ʰaᵇβ̞ʂ̺əhˈ], and the adult version, *carrot*, is extreme; and if this sequence were to have oc-

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curred without the *yes*, I think it would be interpreted as a clear instance of a correction. But alongside the correction the *yes* is a marker of confirmation - a signal to the child that he has said the right thing. So a similar analysis to that presented for extract (4) seems applicable here. *Yes* confirms to the child that he has chosen the right word. But phonetically his utterance needs attention, so the adult uses a redoing. She could, after all, have used *yes* on its own to confirm the child's choice of word, and omitted the redoing altogether. Instead, the use of a redoing gives the adult a chance to repair phonetic aspects of the child's utterance at the same time as confirming its lexical appropriacy. Notice here that the redoing does not project an imitation of the model by the child. The inclusion of *yes* here ends the sequence (see footnote 3), and the business of repair is 'withheld'. It seems, than, that one way in which these redoings work is as a resource which the adult has available for doing some optional (corrective) work on a child's prior utterance.

3.2 The Absence of Acknowledgement/Confirmation Prompts Self-Repair

I turn now to a second way in which the notion of redoings as acknowledgements and confirmations may be bound up with the initiation of repair. In the following cases it is the *non*-occurrence of redoings which is significant.

I first want to claim that children expect acknowledgements and confirmations of their utterances. The following extract illustrates how persistently children may solicit acknowledgements to their utterances when such acknowledgements are not supplied by adult interactants. (The tape begins in the middle of a sequence. Many of J's turns in overlap involve unintelligible singing).

(6) J: ... [( )

C: ... [loured g litte↓r

J: ([ )

C: [coloured glitte] r=

J: ([ ) =

M: [=yea now don't get those out in here though ca:rls plea:se] =

J: = [( )

C: = [coloured glitter] hh

C: the [coloured gl↑itter

J: [( )

(2.0)

C: ° coloured glitter °

(1.0)

J: I would like thi [s o::ne

C: [coloured [gl] itter

M: [do you want the g↓o:ld pa
per=

C: = ( )

M [let's just have a look] 'n' see what e [lse there is,

C: [ ] [(that) the=

C: = coloured gl↑itte↓: r

J: ° >(there we are)<°

C: the coloured glitter

C: the coloured gl [↑itter

M: [yea: t isn't it lo:vely

It seems that M's first response in line six of the extract is somehow not sufficient for C, who persists with different versions of her utterance until it is acknowledged by M with *yea: t isn't it lo: vely*.

Children, then, expect acknowledgements. And other examples show that when a child's utterance is not acknowledged, the child may treat the adult's silence as an indication that there is some kind of problem with the child's utterance. Consider the following extract.

(7) M: what's this.

(0.3)

I: bus:

→ (1.0)

→ I: (t^{h}:ʈ$_{\downarrow}$ɻ$_{\downarrow}$ɐ ʈ$_{\downarrow}$ɻ$_{\downarrow}$ə?$^{k}_{\downarrow}$tɐ [ʈ$_{\downarrow}$ɻ$_{\downarrow}$]

M: [tra:ctor yes.

The child's first response, *bus*, to the adult's name-soliciting question does not get receipted. Instead there is a one second pause, after which the child self-repairs from a version of *bus* to a version of *tractor*, which is receipted by M. So the child appears to treat that lack of acknowledgement as an indication from the adult that there is some kind of problem with the child's utterance - and this prompts him to self-repair.

And this seems to be a reasonable assumption on the part of the child, since there is evidence that this adult at least does deal with inappropriate responses on the part of the child by not receipting them, as the following extract shows.

(8) I: ([ )

M: [let's turn over,

I: ([ )

M: [and see what there is on this page

I: n: o: :

M: ye: : ah look ↑oo↓o what's that

(3.0)

I: [ɸəsˑɬ̈ e̞ɷ h^{ə>} hɐɕˑtˈa̞ɷɾ: ɷʃɟ]
< > < ff >

→ (2.0)

I: [thɬtʰɐ tɕaɬtʰɐ̞ [tɕatʰa]
((whisper)) ((whisper))

M: m [ye tra:ctor yes 'n' what's that?

The child's unintelligible speech following the adult's *what's that?* question may be a non-contingent comment on some other aspect of his surroundings (its amplitude certainly suggests that it may be an 'aside'): it is impossible to be certain. However, whatever the content of that utterance, I think it is clear that it is *not* an appropriate response to M's question - and she doesn't receipt it. Instead there is a two second pause before the child provides three versions of what is an appropriate response, *tractor*, which the adult does receipt. So it seems as if this child's assumption that a lack of acknowledgement indicates a problem with his prior utterance is a reasonable one, based on the adult's actual behaviour.

A similar phenomenon may be seen in two examples cited earlier. In both cases, a pause without acknowledgement precedes a child's attempt at phonetic self-repair. Consider again extract (2):

(2) M: 't 're tho:_s: e

(2.0)

I: [ɸ̃ʔkˑgθᵛʔtʂᶜ]

(0.6)

I: [gʊeˑɪʔtˑɕ ⌈ ʂˀˑ]

→ M: ⌊ g:ɪape (h)

A 0.6 second silence immediately precedes the child's self-repair from a version of *grape* to a more adult-like version of *grape*. (Certain phonetic features, such as labiodentality around the vocalic component following velar closure, and the final sequence of glottal closure, palatalised alveolar plosion and alveolo-palatal friction, indicate that the child's two utterances are both versions of the same word, *grape*.) The second example appears in the following, which is an extension of extract (4):

(9) M: what's that?

(1.0)

I: [kᵡˑɑ›ː ɕˑˈɪ]

M: [hɔˑ ᶿʂ̻ː]

I: [kˉɻʂ̻]

→ (0.8)

→ I: [hˑɑ›ʨ] °hh ° ( )°

After the child's second attempt, [kˉɻʂ̻], there is a 0.8 second silence without acknowledgement from the adult, after which the child

produces a third attempt - his most adult-like - at *horse*. And a final example very nicely illustrates the child making this kind of interpretation when an acknowledgement is not forthcoming, even when, for the child, such an interpretation is itself a problem.

(10) I: [ʔə̤ː ɪç˗ dᵊβə̤eɪʂ] bus

(1.5)

I: biː : kː e [k]

→ (2.0)

→ I: buːt i̲ːs a b̲ike [ʰhhh

M: [it i̲s a bike yg̲s]

Once again the child is naming items from a picture book. The beginning of the child's first turn is unintelligible, but the turn clearly ends with some version of bus. This may be an attempt at a name, or it may be a comment on traffic passing outside. Whichever it is, though, it is not an appropriate name - and M does not receipt it. After a one and a half second pause the child produces an appropriate name, *bike* - either a first try at the naming task or a repaired attempt, depending on the status of his earlier *bus*. But this turn, too, gets no acknowledgement from M. I would claim that it is the two second pause here, without acknowledgement, which prompts the child to make a remonstration that his prior turn was, indeed, appropriate (*buː t i̲ːs a b̲ike*). The adult then acknowledges that *bike* is indeed an appropriate label - although, interestingly, she doesn't address the issue of how the child has interpreted her lack of acknowledgement. In extract (10), then, the child is interpreting the adult's non-acknowledgement as a signal of a problem in his own utterance, and demonstrating that he is making that interpretation, even when perceiving such a signal to be an inappropri-

ate one. In other words, he can remonstrate against the inference he is making from that silence.

4. Concluding Remarks

I hope this study has shown, firstly, the importance of an interactional approach to the study of child language. When the interactional contexts which surround children's utterances are examined in detail, much more evidence becomes available for making claims about how those utterances are functioning for the participants engaged in interaction.

Redoings have been identified as one exemplary feature of the 'language-focussed' nature of child-adult talk. They have been seen to be a resource which the adult has for doing certain kinds of phonetic repair work on children's utterances, at the same time as confirming other aspects of those utterances. And it has been seen that a child expects confirmation to follow appropriate turns in certain sequences, and therefore treats their non-occurrence as locating a trouble source or repairable (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977: 363) in her or his own prior speech. Thus, non-acknowledgement may be seen as one form of other-initiation of repair.[4] While the business of acknowledgement and confirmation is not performed exclusively by redoings, it has been seen that very often these are the structures which do this work in adult-child talk.

These redoing sequences, then, perform work on children's utterances. A redoing picks up an utterance and displays it for some kind of work to be done on it. This work may be corrective, evaluative or investigative; may be immediate or delayed; may be undertaken by the 'redoer' or by the speaker of the original utterance. They are one way in which talk gets talked about, attended to, or dealt with in some way *as language*. These redoings, and other features of language-focussed talk, merit further investigation as fundamental features of the kind of talk through and within which language skills develop.

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4 See Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977.

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